

GALLERY 35

German Painting and Sculpture
in the Late 1400s and 1500s

The early sixteenth century saw a great flowering of German culture as artists in several different regions either absorbed Renaissance naturalism or continued to develop the emotional qualities of Gothic painting from the Middle Ages. Scientific inquiry and spiritual mysticism coexisted. Despite their variety, the paintings and sculpture in this gallery are united by an attention to minute detail and technical expertise.

Albrecht Altdorfer, Workshop of
German, 16th century
*The Rule of Bacchus, The Fall of Man,
The Rule of Mars*, about 1535

Oil on panel: 0.390 x 0.159 m (15 3/8 x 6 1/4 in.); 0.390 x 0.315 m (15 3/8 x 12 3/8 in.); 0.390 x 0.157 m (15 3/8 x 6 3/16 in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.31a-c

Unique in northern Renaissance art, this secular altarpiece combines themes from Christianity and classical mythology. In the central panel, *The Fall of Man*, the figures in the Garden of Eden reinterpret the design of Albrecht Dürer's 1504 engraving *Adam and Eve*. The flanking side panels depict chaos unleashed by two pagan deities. According to medieval concepts of science, a human being's constitution was composed of the Four Humors, or fluids, which were held in balance before the Fall. After the sin of Adam and Eve, individuals came to be dominated by a single humor that determined their temperament. The unruly crowds in the two side panels demonstrate personalities distorted by excessive influences from Bacchus, god of wine, and Mars, god of war. Albrecht Altdorfer (c. 1480/1488–1538) often dealt with man's relationship to nature, and this unusual work was produced under his influence.

Lucas Cranach the Elder
German, 1472–1553
Madonna and Child,
probably about 1535 or later

Oil on panel, 0.712 x 0.521 m (28 1/16 x 20 17/32 in.)
Gift of Adolph Caspar Miller 1953.3.1

Cranach, court painter to the dukes of Saxony, employed a highly sophisticated, stylized manner, evident here in the rich coloring and decorative folds of Mary's elaborate garments. On his knee Jesus balances an apple, symbolizing the Forbidden Fruit and implying that Christ will redeem humanity. He eats a grape from the bunch offered by his mother. These grapes and the glass on the parapet refer to the eucharistic wine of the Last Supper.

*The Crucifixion with the Converted
Centurion*, dated 1536

Oil on panel, 0.508 x 0.346 m (20 x 13 5/8 in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1961.9.69

On a barren hilltop, silhouetted against a glowing horizon and fiery sky, Jesus utters his dying words, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" Cranach literally spelled out this statement in the air. The mounted Roman soldier recognizes Jesus' divinity with the phrase "Truly this man was the Son of God!" The centurion wears armor and a plumed hat fashionable in Renaissance Germany. Cranach was closely associated with Martin Luther and the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation. The artist and the cleric were friends, and both lived in Wittenberg. By 1522, Luther had translated the Bible's New Testament into German so that it would be accessible to lay readers. Significantly,

the words of Jesus and the centurion are here written in German, not the traditional Latin of the Catholic Church.

The Nymph of the Spring, after 1537

Oil on panel, 0.484 x 0.728 m (19 1/16 x 28 5/8 in.)
Gift of Clarence Y. Palitz 1957.12.1



A pseudoclassical legend proposed that a statue of a nymph was found on the banks of the Danube River. Cranach portrayed the nymph as a seductive German woman resting on her bundled gown. Her nudity is emphasized by her jewels and filmy veils. A Latin inscription warns, "I am the nymph of the sacred spring. Do not disturb my sleep. I am resting." Coyly, however, this nymph peers through half-open eyes. Her bow and quiver of arrows are attributes of Diana, the mythological goddess of the hunt, who also symbolizes chastity. The game birds could refer to Diana or to Venus, the goddess of erotic love. Thus the subject is tantalizingly ambiguous.

For his courtly patrons, Cranach provided several versions of this provocative theme. On the rock above the spring is the artist's device, a winged serpent. In 1508 the Saxon duke ennobled Cranach, who thereafter often signed his paintings with a flying-serpent motif.

Albrecht Dürer
German, 1471–1528
Madonna and Child (reverse: *Lot and His
Daughters*), about 1496/1499



Oil on panel, 0.524 x 0.422 m (20 5/8 x 16 5/8 in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.2.16a-b

Painter, printmaker, and author of books on perspective, anatomy, and fortifications, Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg is one of the most important figures in the history of art. Both the subject and style of this panel demonstrate the complexity of his genius. The *Madonna and Child* reveals Netherlandish concepts in portraying a corner of a room with a landscape view beyond the window. Mary's sculptural form and the contrast of her clear blue robes against a red drapery show the Italian influence of Giovanni Bellini, whom Dürer met on two trips to Venice. Jesus' squirming posture and the attention to textures are typically German in taste. The coat of arms in the lower left corner is that of the prominent Haller family of Nuremberg, patrons and friends of the artist.

In contrast to the careful finish of the panel's front, the painting on the reverse is rendered with broad, fluid strokes of the brush. *Lot and His Daughters* is the first known depiction in a panel painting of this story from Genesis. When God destroyed the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He spared the family of the righteous Lot. Lot's wife, who disobeyed and looked back, is shown on the mountain path, hav-

ing been turned into a pillar of salt. The images on the two sides of this panel might be linked by the idea of salvation.

Portrait of a Clergyman (Johann Dorsch?), dated 1516

Oil on parchment, 0.430 x 0.330 m (16 15/16 x 13 in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.2.17

This Catholic cleric may be Johann Dorsch, who was to become the Protestant pastor of Dürer's parish church in Nuremberg. Dürer's incredible observation of nature is evident in the man's eyes, which reveal multiple reflections from the window he faced while posing. Albrecht Dürer signed the work with his *AD* monogram and dated it *1516*. The portrait is one of a number of paintings on parchment made by the artist at about the same time. The parchment gives the paint surface a fine, smooth quality that, in this case, has been somewhat disturbed by the weave of the canvas to which it was later attached.

Matthias Grünewald

German, c. 1475/1480–1528

The Small Crucifixion, about 1511/1520

Oil on panel, 0.613 x 0.460 m (24 1/8 x 18 1/8 in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1961.9.19



Grünewald's work is characterized by mystical power and a highly personal use of radiant colors and distorted forms. Here Jesus' body festers in a gruesome depiction of suffering. The Virgin Mary weeps; Mary Magdalene falls to the earth; and the grief-stricken John the Evangelist bends his wrists at a painful angle. The unusual light effect intensifies the emotional impact and illustrates the biblical account of Christ's death: "and there was a darkness over all the earth." In fact, a solar eclipse occurred over Germany on 1 October 1502, and the artist, with a Renaissance interest in natural phenomena, may have recorded it in the shrouded sun seen at the upper right.

In his famous *Isenheim Altarpiece*, commissioned by a German monastery, Grünewald used a variant of this expressive composition. The only Grünewald in America, *The Small Crucifixion* bears a traditional title, first given to it in the seventeenth century to distinguish this private devotional work from the monumental altarpiece.

Hans Holbein the Younger

German, 1497/1498–1543

Sir Brian Tuke, about 1527

Oil on panel, 0.491 x 0.385 m (19 5/16 x 15 1/8 in.)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.65

This portrait, with its meticulous rendering of the fur collar and cloth-of-gold sleeves, was painted during Holbein's first stay in England in 1526–1528. Sir Brian Tuke was one of those rare persons who was comfortable in the worlds of both scholarship and government. He served Henry VIII as Master of the Posts and as treasurer and secretary to the royal household, but he was also an intimate of the literary, intellectual circle around Sir Thomas More. Holbein portrayed Tuke with impartial accuracy yet also managed to convey a gentle melancholy in the unfocused gaze and wan smile. Tuke's name, age of fifty-seven, and personal motto, "Upright and Forward," bracket his head. He points to a paper with a quotation from the Book of Job: "Are not the days of my life few?"

Edward VI as a Child, probably 1538

Oil on panel, 0.568 x 0.440 m (22 3/8 x 17 3/8 in.)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.64

During his second period in England, from 1532 until his

death in 1543, Holbein became court painter to Henry VIII. This portrait of Henry's much desired heir is presumably the one Holbein presented to the king as a New Year's gift in 1539. The prince, born on 12 October 1537, was the son of Henry's third wife, Jane Seymour. The Latin inscription, written by the poet Sir Richard Morison, exhorts the boy to imitate the virtues of his royal father.



Holbein simultaneously indicated the subject's childhood innocence and regal power. Edward holds a baby rattle as though it were a monarch's scepter, and he waves with an open hand, a gesture implying generosity to his people.

Hans Mielich

German, 1516–1573

Portrait of a Member of the Fröschl Family, about 1539/1540

Oil on panel, 0.616 x 0.470 m (24 1/4 x 18 1/2 in.)
Gift of David Edward Finley and Margaret Eustis Finley 1984.66.1

This man, in an elegant black damask robe and embroidered cuffs and collar, can be identified by a coat of arms on the painting's reverse side. He belonged to a wealthy family from a town east of Munich. Mielich's dramatic landscape setting reveals the influence of Albrecht Altdorfer.



Tilman Riemenschneider

German, c. 1460–1531

Saint Burchard of Würzburg, about 1510/1523

Linden wood, painted, 0.823 x 0.472 x 0.302 m (32 3/8 x 18 1/2 x 11 7/8 in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1961.1.1

A major German sculptor and also a high town official of Würzburg, Riemenschneider here portrayed a bishop presumed to be Burchard who was anointed Würzburg's first bishop in 741. The priest raises one gloved hand in benediction, while his other once held a pastoral staff. The fastener of his robe has been carved away to make room for a reliquary, formerly set inside the diamond-shaped hollow. The wood sculpture is similar to other busts that Riemenschneider carved for altars, tombs, and wall shrines. The sunken cheeks and furrowed brow masterfully convey the gaunt frailty of the careworn holy man. Traces of red pigment remain on the lips, and the black paint on the eyes shows the pupils diverging outward as though the bishop were experiencing a visionary trance.

Hans Schäufelein

German, c. 1480/1485–1538/1540

Portrait of a Man, about 1507

Oil on panel, 0.398 x 0.323 m (15 11/16 x 12 9/16 in.)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.66

Schäufelein worked in Albrecht Dürer's shop from about 1503 to 1507. This powerful head suggests a young artist's efforts to emulate the master's analytical approach to facial structure and expression. The Dürer monogram is a later addition, as is the date *1507*, but the year is consistent with Schäufelein's stylistic development and the sitter's costume.

The works discussed in this guide normally are on view in this room, but installations may change.

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